

ST. MARY'S COUNTY

Selection of Focus Area

The St. Mary's County Health Department has given priority to a number of important public health issues for FY2000. They are:

1. Infant Mortality
2. Stroke Prevention
3. Accident Prevention
4. Cancer Screening
5. Heart Disease Prevention (including smoking prevention, diet, and exercise)
6. Oral Health
7. Improving Access to Health Care



DEMOGRAPHIC OVERVIEW

Estimated Population, by Race – 1998

Total	87,670
White	80.1%
Other	19.9%

Estimated Population, by Age – 1998

Under 1	1,210	18-44	37,360
1-4	5,840	45-64	16,470
5-17	18,940	65+	7,850

All causes Mortality Rate (age-adjusted, per 100,000 population) 1996-1998 474.3

Infant Mortality Rate 1995-1999 9.1

Estimated Mean Household Income – 1999 \$69,200

Estimated Median Household Income – 1998 \$60,000

Civilian Unemployment Rate, Annual Average – 1999 3.1

Labor force (Top 4) – 1995

Services	11,600	Retail Trade	6,500
Government (Federal, Military)	10,000	State & Local Government	3,400

Sources: Maryland Vital Statistics, 1999
Maryland Department of Planning, 1995, 1998, 1999

Promoting Oral Health

Definitions

Oral health means much more than healthy teeth. It means being free of chronic conditions, oral and pharyngeal cancers, tooth decay, periodontal disease, broken teeth or jaws, as well as the absence of developmental and congenital conditions such as cleft lip and palate.

Problem

Oral health is integral to general health. Lack of proper oral health has major consequences for children and adults. A delay, or absence, of routine primary and preventative oral care can cause increased tooth decay, periodontal disease and the consequences that accompany these problems. Oral problems developed in childhood can lead to lifelong oral and even systemic complications. New research points to associations between periodontal diseases and lung and cardiovascular disease, stroke, low birth weight and premature delivery. An association between periodontal disease and diabetes has long been noted. Oral pain can greatly affect quality of life and restrict daily activities. Pain is a common symptom that accompanies many of the conditions which result from poor oral health. The burden of oral disease and conditions is disproportionately shared by people of vulnerable populations. Many of these problems and their treatments can undermine self esteem, discourage social interaction, and lead to chronic stress and depression.

Determinants

St. Mary's County has faced the challenge of residents without access to needed oral care for some time. Many other factors contribute to produce an environment that promotes poor oral health. The Survey of the Oral Health Status of Maryland School Children, 1994-1995, found that 50% of kindergartners in Maryland had dental caries. St. Mary's County had the second highest rate in the State (58.9%). In general, many dentists refuse to accept Medicaid patients due to low reimbursement rates. Voluminous paperwork and managed care bureaucracy also made it difficult for dentists to accept Medicaid consignment. Historically, the St. Mary's County school system has had limited resources to implement primary prevention programs for school students such as screening and dental sealant applications. Additionally, lack of available public transportation has made it almost impossible for parents to bring their children to dental appointments. Even private sources of reimbursement for needed health care have not provided answers to lacking oral health care. Health Share, a voluntary non-profit agency, has only paid for acute emergency visits for the uninsured poor. To date, the public water supply in the County is not fluoridated.

Fortunately, since 1997, there has been a focused effort to improve and promote oral health in St. Mary's County. Yearly, since 1997, \$20,000 of local funds has been made available to treat dental problems. The Community and Public Health Administration's Office of Oral Health has provided \$30,000 yearly toward dental sealant programs in schools, and for treatment costs.

The Leonardtown Rotary Club has made dental health its “signature project” and has made funding available for fluoride rinse programs in six schools, and has promised to supply free tooth brushes and toothpaste to participating schools. In an effort to increase dentists’ participation in Medicaid, the St. Mary’s County Health Department has agreed to be the intermediary to assist dentists with reimbursement issues. The County Health Department has also made transportation available to anyone who needs it for dental services. Plans are underway to allow pick-up of parents from their work place and children from schools to transport them to dentists.

While all these initiatives are good news for St. Mary’s County, there remains much work and coordination to continue the strides that have been made since 1997. Without continued community education and coalition building, successes achieved will not be sustained.

Objective 1 - By 2010, develop a comprehensive primary prevention program for dental health in St. Mary’s County.

Action Steps

- ⇒ The County Health Department and the Patuxent Dental Society will provide community education on the importance of regular check-ups, mouth care, and the importance of proper nutrition to 90% of the residents of St. Mary’s County.
- ⇒ The County Health Department and the Community Health Advisory Group will continue development of a community coalition to improve oral health.
- ⇒ Local dentists and the St. Mary’s County school system will continue screening of children in Head Start programs and in elementary schools for dental caries to achieve a goal of 75% of children.
- ⇒ The school system and the County Health Department will teach at least 90% of Head Start and elementary school children the three essential steps toward good oral health.
- ⇒ The school system, local dentists and the County Health Department will be responsible for placement of dental sealants on at least 80% of children in elementary schools.

Objective 2 - By 2010, improve access to dental care in St. Mary’s County.

Action Steps

- ⇒ The State, St. Mary’s County Health Department, and the Maryland Health Care Foundation will provide basic dental coverage to 75% of uninsured adults under 250% of the federal poverty level and to 90% of children under 300% of the federal poverty level.

- ⇒ Health Insurance companies and the St. Mary's County Health Department will assure that 50% of local dentists will participate in the Medicaid dental program.
- ⇒ The County Health Department will provide transportation for 100% of dental patients without available transportation.
- ⇒ The County Health Department and local dentists will send reminders for dental appointments to 90% of enrolled Medicaid patients.
- ⇒ The County Health Department, Health Share and the Maryland Health Care Foundation will continue to provide prescription coverage to purchase medications at reduced rates to 75% of uninsured adults and to 90% of uninsured children in St. Mary's County.

Partners

Health Share of St. Mary's County • Leonardtown Rotary Club • Maryland Health Care Foundation • Medicaid Managed Care Organizations • Office of Oral Health, DHMH • Patuxent Dental Society • St. Mary's County Health Department • St. Mary's Public School System • Tri-County Dental Care

Related Reports

Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, Office of Child Health; University of Maryland Dental School, Department of Pediatric Dentistry. (1994-1995). *Survey of the oral health status of Maryland school children, 1994-1995*.

Leonardtown Rotary Club. (n.d.). *Signature project report*.

Maryland Department of Health and Mental Hygiene. (1999, May). *Summit report*. From Healthy Maryland Project 2010: Integrated Health Planning Summit.

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (1998, September). *Healthy People 2010*. Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, U.S. Government Printing Office.

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. (2000). Executive summary. *Oral health in America: A report of the Surgeon General*. Rockville, MD: U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research, National Institutes of Health.

Cross-Reference Table for St. Mary's County

See Also

Oral Health 107